

Witch: The Branding of an Innocent
by
Mary LaFleur Langdon

Synopsis

“Perchance she is a witch,” young Faith Osgood cries as several women surround 16-year-old Maggie Jones.

How does a high school junior from 2009 suddenly find herself living in the unforgiving world of the Puritans? Overwhelmed and struggling to keep up her grades and activities, Maggie questions if her goal to become a nurse is realistic. With anxiety mounting and pressure from her parents and school, Maggie wishes she didn't live in 2009. Unexpectedly, she tumbles back in time into a traumatic life that will ultimately test her strength and character.

Now, trapped in the year 1692, Maggie is eventually accepted by the superstitious Puritans of Ipswich, Massachusetts. Nevertheless, as the townspeople begin to grow gravely ill with inexplicable symptoms, she worries they will accuse her of torturing their innocent neighbors. Just as she fears, the town elders, led by the merciless Reverend Wise, charge Maggie with using witchcraft to capture the souls of their children and inflict the village with the frightening illness. In a mockery of a hastily convened court, Maggie is tried for the treasonous act of witchcraft. However, she alone has knowledge of a theory that might explain the source of the baffling afflictions. Now, to escape these pious people and prove that it is not witchcraft that plagues the small village, Maggie, with the help of her new friend, Matthias, must use her knowledge to rid the town of the mysterious disease before she is convicted and hanged.

Excerpt from

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Witchcraft thrived in Salem Village and now the belief was that there were witches in Ipswich, or at least one. There was no convincing these superstitious people otherwise. And now Reverend Wise stood in the Bridgham's home and informed us that the townspeople had gone to him en mass and demanded that “the witch be executed.” *Witch*, such a small word, yet it held such an incredible amount of power. My only hope now was for the doctor to convince them I had acted in good faith with Elizabeth Tookey and little Jacob Salter. And that there were natural causes for the illness that seemed to be overtaking the village. As the doctor was one of the most well respected people in the village, he might be able to dissuade them from their belief in witchcraft. But after the death of Goodwife Wakely, I didn't think there was even a remote possibility that they

would heed his words. The people had put their trust in him. It was a faith beyond words. Would they feel betrayed if they thought they were being made fools, and made to suffer at the hands of the witch he had brought into their fold? He had asked them to accept me unconditionally, which was a tremendous stretch for these people. To extend their welcome to a stranger in such a harrowing time when everyone was fearful of everyone else was truly an act of blind faith.

“We must not waste a single moment in determining if the girl be a witch,” the Reverend said with a sense of urgency. “The trial shall begin on the morrow.”

“Should we not wait for a magistrate from Salem or Boston?” asked Goodman Abbot. “It would not be a just trial without the proper authorities.”

“We have men here of the proper station to act as authority in this matter,” the Reverend answered.

“And who be those men?” the doctor asked. His face that had at first been full of sorrow was now full of resentment and anger.

“Myself, Goodman Tookey, and Goodman Abbot. What say you gentlemen, will you sit in judgment for this trial?”

“Aye,” answered Goodman Tookey.

“I shall,” answered Goodman Abbot, showing sheer exasperation. “Only to be sure the girl has a fair trial. But I fear that Goodman Tookey may not be impartial. He has already stated his belief that the girl has bewitched young Elizabeth. It would not be just for him to sit in judgment. Shall we not choose another?”

“Goodman Tookey,” the Reverend said with much irritation in his voice, turning to the man. “Are you prepared to be impartial in passing judgment on this girl?”

“Aye,” Goodman Tookey answered. “I shall judge only the evidence presented.”

I’m not so sure I believed him. I don’t think Matthias and the doctor did either.

“In accordance with the laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Maggie Jones you are hereby formally charged with committing the depraved and sinful act of witchcraft. Goodman Tookey, pray read the formal charge.”

Goodman Tookey pulled out a crisp parchment and eyed me uncertainly. He cleared his throat and apprehensively began to read from the arrest warrant. “There being complaint made this day before us by Nathaniel Salter, Josiah and Martha Reed, William Wakely, Mary Osgood, Thomas Tookey” – he mumbled when he read his own name – “and on behalf of their Majesties for themselves and their neighbors against Maggie Jones, for high Suspicion of Sundry acts of Witchcraft committed by her on the bodies of Jacob Salter, son of Nathaniel and Susannah Salter, Elizabeth Tookey, daughter of

Thomas and Ruth Tookey, Sarah Wakely, wife of William Wakely, and her unborn child, Mary and Faith Osgood, and several of the neighbors in the Town of Ipswich..."

I couldn't listen anymore and covered my ears, blocking out his droning voice.

"I shall not stand for this! There is no need to put this girl on trial!" the doctor shouted when Goodman Tookey finished. "She is no witch! She is an innocent!"

"The trial shall begin on the morrow," the Reverend said, ignoring the doctor as he picked up his hat and moved toward the door. "Take the girl to the gaol for the night."

"No!" Matthias yelled. "Let her stay with us. We shall bring her to the Meeting House ourselves."

"Hold your tongue, boy. I shall not stand for insolence," the Reverend responded. "I fear she shall attempt to flee. Take the child to the gaol!"

"Sir, can she not remain here?" the doctor pleaded. "We can place two men at the doors through the night. They can escort her on the morrow."

"No!" the Reverend shouted. "The child stays in the gaol tonight!"

I held onto Matthias for as long as I could until they separated us as he and his father were not allowed to accompany me. Some of the others feared they would attempt to help me escape. I wept silently, trying to maintain some composure as the wagon pulled away into the dark freezing night taking me to what felt like a predestined fate. When I looked back, I saw that Matthias' eyes had welled up with tears. I raised my hand as he raised his, in an unspoken affirmation of the unbreakable bond we shared. But he suddenly pulled his gaze from mine and looked up into the starless night sky. I could tell that he also struggled to maintain his composure. And then he leaned forward and covered his face with trembling hands. His shoulders shook uncontrollably and I knew that he wept as well.

Only darkness lay before me now.

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